

mourn with heavy hearts the loss of Nelson Mandela, a man who devoted his life to promoting human rights, freedom, and harmony.

Humanity has lost one of its greatest leaders with the passing of Madiba, or “father,” as he was lovingly called. My prayers go out to his family and all the people of South Africa. He was a personal hero of mine, and of those who work to uphold human rights around the world. He led his nation not only in overcoming the divisions of racism, but in reconciling and healing. Throughout his life Nelson Mandela never stopped fighting for the oppressed, speaking out for the voiceless, and given hope to the hopeless. One of the greatest leaders may have left this world but the lessons he taught us about human dignity, sacrifice, perseverance, and perhaps the most powerful lesson of all—forgiveness—will live on forever.

In 1964, Nelson Mandela was convicted of treason and sentenced to life in prison for his part in the fight for racial equality in apartheid South Africa. At his trial Mandela said:

I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.

Thankfully Mandela did not die during his years of imprisonment, and instead after enduring the unthinkable with grace and dignity, he emerged to lead a country to self determination, reconciliation, and forgiveness.

In 1990, when Nelson Mandela was finally released after 10,000 days of imprisonment, his spirit was stronger than ever. Ten thousand days in prison were not enough to break his spirit and his devotion to the freedom of all people. In his autobiography, Mandela wrote “. . . to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.”

And that he did. His democratic ideals were unwavering. He led by example, living a relatively modest life, refusing to reside in the presidential mansion, and serving only one term as South Africa's first black President.

Mandela's influence on the continent, and indeed around the world, does not end with his passing. His story and moral courage has changed countless lives forever. As he once said, “the true test of our devotion to freedom is just beginning.” State and Federal lawmakers across the United States looked to Mandela as an inspiration when crafting laws that mandated divestment from South Africa's cruel Apartheid regime. I had the privilege of serving as speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates when we passed such legislation. Years later, our Nation is still striving to follow in Mandela's footsteps and fully realize his dream of peace and equality for all of mankind.

As President Obama said, Mandela “took history in his hands, and bent the arc of the moral universe toward justice.” And so on this International Human Rights Day, we pay tribute to the great Madiba, the father of a free and peaceful South Africa, a legendary African, and a shining example for future generations of change-makers who have inherited a better world because of his great deeds.

TRIBUTE TO MARY ELLEN MCCARTHY

• Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, when people think of government, some of the first words that may come to mind are politics and bureaucracy, two things that tend to stifle progress. Today, however, I have the great pleasure of honoring someone who has spent her many years on the Hill overcoming these barriers. She has implemented changes and fixed problems to improve the lives of veterans and their families in a very real way. Now, as she moves into retirement, she leaves behind an example to which we should all aspire.

Mary Ellen McCarthy has spent the last 7 years of her distinguished career serving as the lead investigator for the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs and the decade before that as staff director for two subcommittees of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. In that time, she has visited nearly every Department of Veterans Affairs regional office and reviewed thousands of benefits claims. She has not only identified gaps in services to veterans and their families, but also problems within VA. Most importantly, Mary Ellen never rested with the identification of a problem. Instead, she found solutions to meet the needs of veterans and their families and worked relentlessly to ensure they were put into place as quickly as possible.

Among her many achievements, Mary Ellen will be forever recognized for her extraordinary work in ensuring Vietnam era veterans and their families receive the benefits to which they are entitled. She has worked tirelessly to identify the many veterans whose exposure to dangerous toxins was previously overlooked. Her efforts have helped veterans with service on the inland waterways of Vietnam, along the DMZ in Korea, and on the perimeters of Air Force Bases in Thailand. Her work has led to vindication and assistance to those suffering from health problems related to Agent Orange exposure. Her efforts did not stop with the veterans themselves, however. She also brought attention to the children who are born with spina bifida, as a result of their parents' exposure to Agent Orange.

So much of Mary Ellen's work has focused on those most in need—elderly and low-income veterans and surviving family members. For example, one of Mary Ellen's investigations revealed the surviving spouses of veterans who had been receiving VA disability bene-

fits were not receiving the payments to which they were entitled during the month of their spouse's passing. These payments not only help with funeral costs, but provide some time to make other financial arrangements. Her discovery of this oversight and subsequent actions resulted in approximately 200,000 surviving spouses receiving more than \$124 million in benefits, allowing them to focus on moving forward after the death of a loved one.

Mary Ellen has also been heavily involved in working toward elimination of the claims backlog, a challenge that has plagued the Department for decades and caused far too many veterans unnecessary hardship. Before she came to Capitol Hill, she spent two decades working as a nurse and then a lawyer, helping low-income and elderly individuals obtain government benefits. This experience gave her a unique insight into the challenges of claims processing and she has been able to offer a number of solutions that may otherwise have been overlooked.

These are just a few examples of the very real contributions Mary Ellen has made to the veterans community throughout her career. To those who have had the pleasure of working with her, Mary Ellen has been an inspiration—working tirelessly to provide assistance to those who have served this great Nation—a true veterans' advocate.

As she enters into her much deserved retirement, she can rest easy knowing her efforts will continue benefiting veterans and their families for generations to come, which is, as she is known to say, not bad for an old lady.

Mary Ellen, thank you for your years of advocacy on behalf of our Nation's veterans. I wish you only the best in retirement. •

TRIBUTE TO SIMEON BOOKER

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, today I wish to honor Simeon Booker as he receives an honorary doctor of letters from Youngstown State University on December 15, 2013. Mr. Booker has devoted his life's work to chronicling the history of the civil rights movement in America.

As an African-American college student in the 1940s and 1950s, Mr. Booker experienced discrimination firsthand at what was then Youngstown College. Refusing to accept the indignities he found there, he transferred to Virginia Union University where he continued to champion the rights of Black students.

Early in his career, he was hired by his hometown newspaper, the Youngstown Vindicator, where he would write local columns focused on the city's African-American population and summaries for the local Black baseball leagues. He went on to work for the Cleveland Call and Post and was offered the esteemed Nieman Fellowship at Harvard University in the 1950s.

Mr. Booker became the first Black reporter for the Washington Post in